DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 381 278 PS 023 206

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TITLE Parental Expectations of Public Preschool Programs in the Hardin County Area.
PUB DATE Dec 94
NOTE 15p.; Dot-matrix print may not copy well.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Tests/Evaluation Instruments (160)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Ancillary School Services; *Educational Environment; Educational Objectives; Learning Activities; *Parent Attitudes; *Parent School Relationship; *Preschool Education; *Public Education; School Attitudes; Socialization
IDENTIFIERS Ohio (Hardin County); *Play Learning; Project Head Start

ABSTRACT

An exploratory study examined the expectations of parents toward goals, curriculum, and services of the public preschool in Hardin County, Ohio. Previous studies have shown that the goals of the preschool influence the curriculum and determine whether the preschool is academic or social in nature, that academics are emphasized even though play has been determined to be the way children learn, that a strong partnership with parents at the preschool level benefits children, and that a strong partnership with parents is evident in the Head Start program. Participants of the study were 23 parents of public preschool children, surveyed as to their perceptions and expectations regarding goals of preschool curriculum, other possible services provided by the preschool, and curriculum committee membership. The data obtained suggest that parents wanted the following: (1) a strong partnership with the teachers; (2) a strong academic environment that also stresses play as the learning medium; (3) an opportunity for children to learn social skills; and (4) no involvement from the public preschool in meeting their children's medical or dental needs. The study indicates that parents want some of the standards that are evident in Head Start. (A copy of the questionnaire is included.) (BAC)

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Runing head: PARENTAL EXPECTATIONS OF PUBLIC PRESCHOOL PROGRAMS

ED 381 278

Parental Expectations of Public Preschool Programs in the Hardin County Area

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Abstract

This exploratory study examined the expectations of parents towards goals, curriculum, and services of the public preschool. The expectations of twenty-three parents were obtained through a questionnaire. The data obtained suggested the parents want a strong partnership with the teachers and a strong academic environment which stresses play as the learning medium. The parents wanted their children to learn social skills. The parents did not expect the public preschool to become involved in their children's medical or dental responsibilities.

Parental Expectations of Public Preschool Programs in the Hardin County Area

In the county there are only two districts out of five that operate public preschool classrooms. The State Department of Education decided to funnel the preschool grant money to those preschool programs abiding by Head Start performance standards. The public preschools are expected to use the best practices in Head Start as a model.

Purpose

The purpose of this exploratory study was to investigate what parents of public preschool children in the Hardin County area expected those preschools to have as their goal. The questionnaire was given to parents to discover not only what goals they expected out of the preschool program, but what other services they wanted provided for their children while they are in preschool. I wanted to find out what type of partnership they expected. By surveying the parents of the public preschools in our county, I hope to have input into the direction the public preschools should take in the future.

Previous Studies

The goals of the preschool determine to a large degree the structure of the preschool. Whether it is academically oriented or social depends on those who are in charge. In 1989, Carlson & Stenmalm-Sjoblom reported parents in the United States wanted a strong academic environment in the preschool. Rescorla (1991) found parents who placed strong value on early

academics sent their children to schools where the teachers and the school also placed emphasis on early academics. Rothlein and Brett (1987) were concerned about the strong emphasis on academics. In their study parents and teachers did not consider play as important and showed a lack of interest in it in the preschool setting. They viewed play as separate from learning. Bredekamp (1987), however, showed the need for a developmentally appropriate preschool where the emphasis is on learning through play.

A strong partnership, or relationship between the teachers and parents is very important in school, more so in preschool than in any other area. There are many different levels of partnership as Pugh (1985) pointed out in his article. Partnership can range from non-participation to control of the resources, budget and staff selection. Parental involvement depended upon the kind of partnership that was stressed.

Head Start has the strong partnership which was mentioned by Pugh (1985). In Head Start, parents are included in key roles of making decisions and being trained to become the staff. Lombardi (1990) stressed the role Head Start has played in providing comprehensive education, health, and social services to 11 million children. From the meta analysis of studies mentioned in Schweinhart and Weikart (1986), the benefits of adequately funded Head Start programs run by well-trained, competent teachers are well documented. The positive effects include the children's intellectual and socioemotional

development and the effects on children's health status.

Summary

The goals of the preschool influence the curriculum and determine whether the preschool is academic or social in nature. Academics are stressed in the United States even though play has been determined to be the way children learn and to be more developmentally appropriate. If we have a strong partnership with parents at the preschool level, children will benefit. Strong partnership with parents is evident in Head Start's program.

Major Questions

Do parents want the model of Head Start on which to base the partnership, curriculum, and services? Do the parents want assistance with their child's needs, whether they are social, emotional, medical, or dental? What type of educational programs do the parents expect in public preschools? Do the parents want a more social or academic preschool?

Method

Subjects

The participants in this study were 23 parents of public preschool children in the Hardin County area. The Hardin County area has two districts with public preschools. Preschool children are 3, 4, or 5-year-olds. Some of the families have two preschool children in the preschool classroom. This lowered the number of surveys expected to be returned. Parents from both preschools are from a rural area.

Both districts have the public preschool classroom housed in the elementary building. The average income for one district is $24,052, while the other district's average income is $22,694, according to the Ohio Department of Taxation.

Measures

The instrument used to conduct the descriptive research was a questionnaire developed by the author (see the Appendix for a copy of this questionnaire). The questionnaire was developed to survey the parents about their perceptions and expectations of the goals of preschool curriculum, other possible services of preschool, and curriculum committee membership. The survey consisted of three different sections. The first section consisted of statements. Parents circled their response to each statement. The responses were of a 4-point Likert-type scale(Agree, Sort of Agree, Sort of Disagree, Disagree). The second section had seven yes or no structured questions. The third section contained five possible preschool areas of concern rated in importance with the most important being first.

Procedures

The questionnaire surveys were hand delivered to the two public preschool teachers, who in turn, either hand delivered the survey to the parents who stop daily at the school or sent them home with the preschool child. A total of 35 surveys were given out in this manner. A total of 23 parents responded by completing and returning the survey. The results of the survey

were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS).

Results

The age of the parents who responded to the survey ranged in age from 24 to 41 with the mean age of the parents being 30.2 yrs. with a S.D. of 4.8.

Twelve questions asked parents to agree or disagree with possible areas of preschool concern. Table 1 presents the percent agreement or disagreement with those twelve goals, services or committee structure.

Insert Table 1 about here

About 96% of the parents wanted curriculum committees in which both parents and teachers were on the committee to decide what is taught in preschool. Of the parents who responded, none of them wanted a curriculum committee which consisted of only parents. This was modified by 87% of the parents who did not believe teachers should be the only ones on the curriculum committee.

Seven yes or no structured questions aimed at these same areas of concern are listed in Table 2.

Insert Table 2 about here

The percentages for partnership are lower in Table 2 than in Table 1, but similar to Table 1.

From those questions involving an academic structure to

the preschool curriculum, 91% of the parents thought their child should know his/her colors and how to count in preschool. Yet 61% did not think their child should learn to read in preschool. When reading, counting, and recognizing colors were combined on one area of concern, 70% ranked it first or second.

A high percentage of parents (95%) in my study agreed play was important in preschool.

Everyone of the parents who responded to the survey (100%) agreed it was important for the child to get along with others. Yet only 48% of them agreed the most important purpose of preschool is to teach their child social skills. In ranking this goal 78% ranked this first and 22% ranked it second.

A high percentage (91%) of the parents believed the school was teaching the child what he/she needed to know to be ready for school.

In all three sections of the survey parents did not think the schools should take care of the medical or dental needs of their child. Over 78% (r=.78, a=.01) of the respondents indicated medical and dental needs should not be taken care of by the preschool.

Discussion

As expected, the results of the survey showed the parents want a strong partnership with the preschool. The parents want to be involved with the teachers in deciding the curriculum.

The questions involving academic goals in the preschool

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curriculum indicate parents want a fairly strong academic environment in the preschool, just as Carlson (1989) reported. The parents did, however, disagree with Rothlein and Brett (1987) because 95% think play is important in preschool. This would indicate parents expect both the academic and play in the preschool program for their child. These parents may realize the importance of play in learning. Another study is needed to determine this.

From the social skill results of this study, it would indicate parents feel it is important for their child to get along, yet parents placed importance on other areas, or skills.

The medical and dental results show the parents do not want the public preschools to become involved in the family's responsibilities in this area.

This study would indicate parents want some of the standards that are evident in Head Start. It would be beneficial to those in charge to incorporate those standards parents strongly favored into the public preschool system.

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Table 1

Pre School parent attitudes toward goals and services. (N=23)

Goals	Percent Answers					
	Agree	Sort-of Agree	Sort-of Disagree	Disagree	Mean	S. D.
1. Get along	100	--	--	--	1.00	.00
2. Social/mental needs	57	35	--	--	1.60	.89
3. Parent/teacher comm.	48	48	--	4	1.60	.72
4. Playing is important	83	13	4	--	1.22	.52
5. Medical/dental needs	--	22	9	69	3.48	.85
6. Colors/count to 10	50	41	4.5	4.5	1.64	.79
7. Teacher comm.	4	9	30	57	3.39	.84
8. Teach eating habits	30	44	22	4	2.00	.85
9. Teach read	--	39	17	44	3.04	.93
10. Teach social skills	48	26	17	9	1.87	1.01
11. Wants readiness	87	13	--	--	1.13	.34
12 Parent comm.	--	--	17	83	3.83	.40

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Table 2

Pre-School parent attitudes toward goals and services. (n=23)

Goals	Responses		
	(1) Yes	(2) No	No Response
1. Only Parents on committe	5	14	4
2. Parents/Teacher committee	17	4	2
3. Only Teacher on committee	11	6	6
4. Teach eating habits	5	14	4
5. Social needs	12	8	3
6. School Teaching Readiness	21	2	--
7. Medical/Dental needs	3	19	1

Just circle the most accurate answer response to each question or statement.

Agree 1	Sort of Agree 2	Sort of Disagree 3	Disagree 4

1)	I feel it is very important for my child to learn how to get along with others in preschool.	1	2	3	4
2)	The preschool program must be a resource for my child's social or mental needs.	1	2	3	4
3)	Parents should be on a committee with teachers to make a joint decision about what is taught in preschool.	1	2	3	4
4)	Playing in preschool is important for my child.	1	2	3	4
5)	My child's medical and dental needs should be taken care of by the preschool program.	1	2	3	4
6)	The preschool teachers should teach my child his/her colors and how to count to ten.	1	2	3	4
7)	Only teachers should be on the committee to decide what is taught in preschool.	1	2	3	4
8)	Teaching my child about food and good eating habits has to be a part of the preschool day.	1	2	3	4
9)	My child should learn how to read in preschool.	1	2	3	4
10)	The most important purpose of preschool is to teach my child social skills.	1	2	3	4
11)	I want my child to learn what he/she needs to know to be ready for kindergarten.	1	2	3	4
12)	There should only be parents on a committee to decide what is taught to their child.	1	2	3	4

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Appendix

1)	Do you think parents should decide what is taught in preschool?	1.YES	2.NO
2)	Do you think the parents should meet regularly with the teachers to decide what is taught in school?	1.YES	2.NO
3)	Do you think teachers should decide what is taught?	1.YES	2.NO
4)	Do you think the school should be the one to teach your child about what is good for them to eat?	1.YES	2.NO
5)	Do you believe the school should take care of your child's social needs?	1.YES	2.NO
6)	Do you believe the preschool is teaching your child what he/she needs to know to be ready for school?	1.YES	2.NO
7)	Do you think the school should take care of your child's medical and dental needs?	1.YES	2.NO

How important is it to you as a parent to have the preschool provide each of the following areas? Please list them in order of importance to you.

1_____ 3_____ 5_____

2_____ 4_____

A. Learning how to count, read, and learn the color names.

B. Learning how to get along with other boys and girls.

C. Parents on the curriculum committee.

D. Our family's social and mental needs.

E. Our family's medical and dental needs.

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1) Are you a male or female? 1) MALE 2)FEMALE

2) What is your age? _____

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